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Ms J Higgins  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Higgins

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 May 2010 to look at work in English.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory and improving.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Results in GCSE English improved in 2009, reaching standards that were above average. The proportion of students that achieved the higher grades A or A\* also improved slightly. GCSE English Literature results were not as good as in the previous year, although there were considerably more A and A\* grades. Attainment in English Literature was also above average. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment was below average.
- The contextual value-added data show that progress in English has been poor in recent years. In particular, boys have tended to make slower progress than girls. Current evidence shows that progress has improved and learning in lessons observed was at least satisfactory.
- Standards in the A-level courses for English are broadly in line with national averages, although achievement has been stronger in English Literature than in the combined course.

- Key Stage 2 results show that attainment on entry is above average and that the gap between reading and writing is substantial, especially at the higher Level 5.

### Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Most students are very positive about English. They enjoy the variety in lessons, opportunities to take an active role and the teachers' enthusiasm.
- Lessons observed were satisfactory overall with some good elements. Relationships were mostly good and teachers successfully engaged students through a variety of lively activities. Many of the tasks motivated boys effectively. Lessons were well planned and there was a consistency of approach with teachers attempting to identify and make explicit the students' learning.
- However, while the activities chosen succeeded in engaging students, they were not always as effective in driving forward progress. Some activities did not relate clearly enough to the learning objectives and the clarity of learning objectives varied from lesson to lesson. Teaching was 'pacy' but did not always allow enough time for key activities, including time for students to show what they had learnt through their own writing.
- Teachers ensure that students have a clear understanding of the assessment criteria across all key stages. Good feedback is provided through the 'milestones' assessments and this provides students with clear targets for improvement. However, the quality of day-to-day marking is highly variable and does not build systematically on these targets.

### Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The department offers a wide range of courses in English to sixth-form students.
- Teachers are working hard to revise the curriculum across all key stages to ensure better progress for students. A good start has been made in planning the new GCSE courses and providing different pathways for students.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum identifies the core text types and skills to be taught. There are some innovative features, such as the language study unit in Year 8, and some lesson time has been found to promote wider, independent reading. However, given weaker performance in writing on entry to the school, the programme lacks detail about how students' writing skills are to be developed systematically. In addition, some students currently have too few opportunities for extended writing in Years 8 and 9.
- Information and communication technology is used well by students in Key Stage 4 but is less common for younger students. Students have relatively few opportunities to create their own moving image texts.

- The integrated Bright Sparks programme in Year 7 is popular with students and very well planned. It provides a wide range of good contexts for students to develop their writing and speaking skills.
- Enrichment provision is satisfactory and improving. Many activities are directly related to examination study. However, writing and other competitions increasingly provide a wider range of extra-curricular opportunities. Intervention is well planned and targeted at a wide range of students. Students are very appreciative of the extra help provided by teachers in revision and catch-up sessions.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory with some good features.

- Senior leaders are very clear about the strengths and weaknesses in English and have acted vigorously to support and improve the work of the department. The recent departmental review provides an effective agenda for future action. The department has responded to this well and has detailed and appropriate action plans to improve performance.
- Departmental leadership has already shown capacity for improvement, with the rise in GCSE results last year and better schemes of work. There has also been very good provision to cover the absence through illness of key teachers.
- The school is seeking to improve strategies for better monitoring and evaluation in English. Students' progress is being monitored more carefully and there are plans to improve feedback from students and to provide more regular work sampling and lesson observation. Past gaps in quality assurance mean that the effective subject action plan is at its weakest in identifying how teaching can be moved forward. However, the department contains some teachers who are able to model good practice well and the head of department is keen to ensure that this good practice is shared on a more regular basis.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
  - enhancing the effectiveness of learning objectives within lessons
  - improving planning by focusing more clearly on the impact of individual activities on students' learning
  - using existing good practice within the department to drive up the quality of teaching overall
- reviewing provision for writing, including extended writing, across the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett  
Her Majesty's Inspector